



Founding Partners:

American Federation of Teachers, CT

Connecticut Association of Urban
School Superintendents

Connecticut Association of Public
School Superintendents

Connecticut Education Association

Connecticut Federation of
School Administrators

Neag School of Education,
University of Connecticut

CommPACT Schools FAQs

1. What are CommPACT Schools? Though they remain accountable to their school district, CommPACT Schools are existing public schools that have been granted autonomy in governance, budgeting and curriculum. A partnership of school district administrators, school representatives, teachers, community leaders, and parents share in the decision making. Supported by UConn's Neag School of Education's Institute for Urban School Improvement, CommPACT Schools work collaboratively with experts in education to enhance student learning.

2. What are the benefits of reorganizing as a CommPACT School? CommPACT Schools create an empowering and trusting work environment for teachers and administrators. This accomplishes two things that, together, create better student learning conditions. Because teachers and administrators are integral to the CommPACT Schools' development, planning, and decision-making structures, a greater sense of shared vision, mission, and ownership enhance the teaching and learning experience. Because research has shown that the attraction and retention of teachers are linked to whether teachers are able to share in the school-level decisions that affect the students they teach, the CommPACT School model is better able to attract and retain highly qualified teachers—especially in the urban areas where CommPACT schools have been established.

3. How does a CommPACT School become established? In 2008 the first cohort of CommPACT schools were selected from schools who applied to participate in the program. As part of the application process 90 percent of the school's staff and parents in the school agreed to become a CommPACT School. In addition, the school administrators, superintendents, and local unions had to agree to support the school as a CommPACT School. Under guidance from UConn staff the schools spent six months preparing the application and securing the stakeholders support. Eight schools were selected by the Executive Board of the CommPACT Schools Partners that included the Presidents or Executive Directors of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), Connecticut Federation of Teachers (AFT-CT), Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS), Connecticut Federation of School Administrators and Dean of the Neag School of Education at UConn. The first cohort of eight schools began work in the fall of 2008. All of these schools were on the NCLB watch list regarding AYP.

4. What is UConn's Neag School of Education's role in the CommPACT Schools initiative? By partnering with higher education, the CommPACT Schools are strongly connected to a resource for research-based practices. The Neag School's Institute for Urban School Improvement serves as the independent support center for the CommPACT Schools providing expertise in data gathering and analysis, priority setting, and providing of professional development activities to implement research based practices. The CommPACT Schools are assigned on site coaches who work in one or two of the schools on a full time basis to support the range of services provided. UCONN also provides access to on-going professional learning opportunities conducted at the University for teachers and administration such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS); Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM-R) – Reading and Math; and the Assessment Colloquia Series.

5. How are children selected to attend a CommPACT School—won't CommPACT Schools just attract the best students? CommPACT Schools operate under existing local school attendance policies; no lotteries and no creaming of top students will occur.

6. What do CommPACT Schools cost the district? CommPACT Schools are reorganized public schools and, therefore, are not duplicative of existing services. Apart from the initial reorganization cost of releasing

teachers for planning and start-up, a school that reorganizes as a CommPACT School does not cost the district any additional funds. CommPACT Schools are given the same budget they would have received as a traditional public school. What's key is that those who are closer to the students are empowered to make decisions about how best to tailor the budget with the goal of improving student learning.

7. How is the CommPACT Schools outside support funded? Funding of the CommPACT Schools initiative takes a team effort. Using privately raised funds, UConn's Neag School of Education provided financial support for the first year of operation for the needed planning, a series of informational meetings at each potential school site, the school application and selection process and continues to provide in-kind support.

Working together as a team the partners worked with the Connecticut General Assembly to provide \$475,000 in FY 2009 and \$450,000 in FY 2010 to the Neag School's Institute for Urban School Improvement to fund the implementation and day-to-day operation of the CommPACT Schools initiative.

With a \$250,000 award in both year one and two for total support to date of \$500,000, the NEA Foundation is funding the Neag School's evaluation of the CommPACT Schools initiative. The NEA Foundation offers programs and grants that support educators' efforts to close the achievement gap and increase student achievement.

Dr. Sally Reis selected two CommPACT Schools as sites for her federally funded SEM-R Reading Study which provided \$62,500 in books, professional development and on site coaching to West Side Middle School in Waterbury and Barnum School in Bridgeport.

Other private support totaling \$315,000 includes the AT & T Foundation - \$50,000; Balfour Foundation - \$195,000; Community Foundation of Southeastern Connecticut - \$15,000; Fairfield County Community Foundation - \$20,000; JP Morgan - \$25,000; Near and Far Foundation - \$10,000.

The total program support from outside sources for two years totals \$1,802,500.

8. What is the role of the school district in a CommPACT School? The school district is an active partner with its CommPACT Schools and agrees to support the autonomy of the school site, participate as a resource to the school, and support public reporting of each CommPACT School's performance and operation assessments.

9. How are the teacher unions involved? The teacher unions are active partners in the life of the CommPACT School. AFT-CT and CEA were key founders of the CommPACT Schools initiative. The unions are an integral part of the decision making and governance process at both the local school level and state level. Our current educational environment requires out-of-the-box thinking and the expertise and professionalism of the unions is a key to the success of the project.

10. How do CommPACT Schools coexist with collective bargaining agreements? Teachers working in CommPACT Schools are covered under collective bargaining agreements particularly those agreements that pertain to salary. However, teachers in a CommPACT School may agree to alter parts of their collective bargaining agreement relating to hours or other requirements affecting day-to-day working conditions if they believe it will improve student learning. Such flexibility has been proven to increase efficiency and, most importantly, to increase collaboration in schools by better utilizing the distribution of time.

11. How is this reform different from past school reforms? Generally speaking, public school reform efforts in the past have been neither systemic nor organic. The CommPACT School model is organic because for a school to reorganize as a CommPACT School, interest must be developed among teachers, administrators, parents and the community members together. Without expressed mutual interest, no reorganization can occur. This model is also systemic because it fundamentally changes the governance and decision-making structures that affect student learning most directly.

12. What does the term “evidence-based practice” mean when used in the context of CommPACT Schools?

Evidence-based practice refers to school practices that research has shown to be effective in addressing a particular challenge in a particular context. Much of the education practice now in use by most schools has no research to support its efficacy. Additionally, many research-based practices do not examine the specific context in which the intervention is effective or the conditions necessary for successful implementation. In CommPACT Schools, processes are put in place to ensure practices are both research based and proven effective for a school’s particular condition. The key is that the school site team identifies which research based practices will work best in their particular school and with their particular students.

13. Are CommPACT Schools charter schools? No. The current charter schools in Connecticut operate under state charters and accept students through a lottery. In contrast, CommPACT schools operate within a local town or city school district and take all students within a specific local school attendance area. It is important to note that CommPACT schools were initiated by teachers unions and that shared decision making is a hallmark of these new schools. This shared decision making is supported by research-based student improvement strategies.

14. Are CommPACT Schools magnet schools? No. CommPACT Schools take existing schools and convert them to schools that employ evidence-based practice in all aspects of school operation including governance, decision making, and instruction.

15. How are CommPACT Schools monitored and assessed? Part of the initial implementation of CommPACT Schools is a thorough assessment of school performance and operation. This assessment is a public process with public reporting. Throughout the life of a CommPACT School academic progress is monitored and publicly reported. A key feature of the accountability plan is use of growth curve modeling which allow monitoring and reporting on individual student growth (not just performance) and school growth on a regular and ongoing basis. School site leadership teams use this data to monitor and improve practice. In addition, UConn uses this information to change and enhance the teacher education and educational leadership preparation practice. Data from the first year of operation, which will be collected by the end of each school year, will be analyzed over the summer to monitor progress and provide information and support for program changes for the next academic year.

16. How will the Neag School of Education use this Project in the new NCATE accreditation process? The Neag School of Education has already begun to integrate its teacher education program into the CommPACT Schools project. This year a cohort of Teacher Education candidates in the Teacher Certification Program for College Graduates (TCPCG), a one year teacher preparation program, completed year long student teaching and internships in the West Side Middle School in Waterbury. In addition to participating in CommPACT planning and professional development these students helped in the data gathering process. As part of their program requirements teacher education candidates completed action research projects on school based problems that were identified by the CommPACT Leadership team. Information from these action research projects ranged from parent engagement to improving the structure for the student council. Over the next few years all preservice education programs ranging from principal preparation to counselor education will be integrated.

17. How will the Neag School of Education share best practice with other schools? Because of the generosity of the NEA Foundation we have a four year research grant to document the effectiveness of the program and disseminate the results of the studies to help other districts work through sustained educational reform. In keeping true to the philosophy of CommPACT Schools the research team developed the research questions with input from the teachers and administrators in the schools. Under the direction of the Neag School of Education Center for Educational Policy Analysis a research team is conducting both quantitative and qualitative studies on such issues as changes in management /union relationships, the effectiveness of intervention strategies, and changes in school climate. All schools are tracking changes in student achievement utilizing growth curve models of assessment, as well as tracking standardized state of Connecticut Mastery Test scores.